

VZCZCXRO8351

PP RUEHBZ RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO

DE RUEHUJA #2014/01 3080831

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 040831Z NOV 09

FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7410

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2232

RHMFIA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFIA/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002014

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2019

TAGS: PGOV PTER PHUM ELAB KISL KCRM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BORNO STATE RESIDENTS NOT YET RECOVERED
FROM BOKO HARAM VIOLENCE

REF: A. ABUJA 1053

¶B. 07 ABUJA 1558

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4. (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Boko Haram attacks clearly left a deep impression on Maiduguri residents, who still appeared shocked by the magnitude of the violence which ultimately killed some 700 individuals. Most interlocutors asserted that the state and federal government responded appropriately and, apart from the opposition party, overwhelmingly supported Yusuf's death without misgivings over the extrajudicial killing. Security remained a concern in Borno, with residents expressing concern about importation of arms and exchanges of religious messages across porous international borders. The government has proposed a preaching board which will certify Muslim preachers, but it has not yet been inaugurated. While most contacts described Borno as a "State of Peace" and did not expect additional attacks, the Northeast remained vulnerable to violence and extremist attacks due to lack of employment opportunities for youth, exasperated by ethnic and religious tensions. End Summary.

BOKO HARAM ANTECEDENTS

¶2. (SBU) In Maiduguri October 20 to 23, PolOffs met with religious leaders, government officials, politicians, and journalists to discuss events leading up to the July 2009 violence and the potential for future conflict. While most interlocutors pointed to outside influences and settlers as the cause of Boko Haram, Borno State Political and Cabinet Affairs Permanent Secretary Alhaji Hayatudeen Baba Omar claimed Boko Haram was "home grown," stemming from poverty and low literacy rates.

¶3. (SBU) University of Maiduguri Professor of Mass Communications Dr. Gambo said Yusuf came to Borno State because of the existing Izala infrastructure, which he used to recruit naive youth before breaking away from mainstream Izala. He said Boko Haram was a name given to the group after the attacks in July 2009, but they were also known locally as "Yusufiyya." (N.B., The Izala, or Jama'at Izalatil Bidiawa Iqamatus Sunnah, is a popular conservative

movement advocating return to the "true practice" of the Islam but not necessarily creation of an Islamic state. End Note.)

¶4. (C) A conservative Sufi imam, Sheikh Fatahi said Boko Haram was not a new concept, and claimed it came out of Izala. He said Ja'afar Mahmud Adamu (a Kano-based Izala Sheikh killed in 2007 (reftel b)) trained Yusuf and even called him the "leader of young people," but the two had split 5 to 7 years ago. He told PolOffs that Adamu and Yusuf both preached in Maiduguri's Indimi Mosque, where the Deputy Governor worships. According to Fatahi, the state government had initially welcomed Izala, including individuals sympathetic to Yusuf, into the government. While the Council of Ulama reportedly advised the government and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) not to publicize Yusuf's preaching, he said the government would not intervene. The NTA, as a commercial enterprise, insisted on airing paid programming indiscriminately. Fatahi blamed the government Oprogramming indiscriminately. Fatahi blamed the government for ignoring Ulama's warnings about the potential danger of some factions within the Izala.

¶5. (SBU) Religious Affairs Ministry Director Muhammad Abdullahi said the Ministry was aware of Mohammad Yusuf, considered him "overzealous," and encouraged him to calm down. But Fatahi said Yusuf's arrests "made him a hero" and increased his popularity. Likewise, Deputy Governor Dibal said "Yusuf was mystified to be a messiah."

¶6. (C) Dibal claimed al Qaeda had ties to Boko Haram, but ceased support after deciding Yusuf was an unreliable person.

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He said if al Qaeda had remained, the fight would have been "heavier." He asserted that, if Yusuf had declared "those in political office have increased our poverty" -- rather than "western education is evil" -- this message would have resonated with the public and he would have succeeded. Dibal claimed Yusuf had planned to attack during Ramadan, but moved up the date after the June 2009 clash between Operation Flush II officers and some of Yusuf's followers (reftel a). The Deputy Governor showed PolOffs a video clip of Yusuf's "Open Letter to the President," a video which circulated after the June clash and which showed Yusuf preaching in Hausa, accompanied by high quality graphics of weapons.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

¶7. (SBU) Most observers, including the Shehu of Borno and the Deputy Governor, generally asserted that the state and federal government responded appropriately to the Boko Haram attacks. Some said Operation Flush prevented the violence from getting worse. Deputy Governor Dibal grumbled that the international community had not commended Borno State for ending the conflict in such a short time.

¶8. (C) Interlocutors overwhelmingly supported Yusuf's death, and did not appear bothered by the extrajudicial killing. African Independent Television (AIT) Correspondent Patrick Mark claimed he had inside knowledge of a plan to kill anyone who brought Yusuf to Abuja. The Shehu of Borno described Yusuf's death as justified, and the Deputy Governor said he personally did not consider Yusuf's death "extrajudicial," or a cause for concern, but rather "necessary" because of the state of emergency Borno experienced. Dibal, however, said the opposition parties would frame Yusuf's death as an "extrajudicial killing" as one reason to oppose the ANPP. Dr. Gambo said, "human rights issues aside, it is a great relief Mohammad Yusuf is gone." Only the People's Democratic Party (PDP) described Yusuf's killing as a human rights violation.

¶9. (SBU) Local Government Representative Alhaji Hassan Zanna Boguma remarked that, while the government has not inaugurated the preaching board yet, preachers have been advised to preach with caution. He justified the preaching board as a necessary security arrangement to prevent extremism, and claimed that he has not received a single dissenting voice in Borno to the proposal for a board to certify preachers.

¶10. (C) Sheikh Fatahi, on the other hand, said he is sure some Ulama will not support the board, but said he could not make a judgment until the board members are known. He asserted that preaching boards have existed for a long time, but only now the government had become formally involved in managing them. He said state-run television and radio stations, for example, would only air preaching by approved clerics.

¶11. (U) Boguma said the ward heads, village heads, district heads, council, and emirate council would approve preachers' credentials. The Shehu of Borno said he and the Grand Imam would serve as patrons of the preaching board, while Ibrahim Qwould serve as patrons of the preaching board, while Ibrahim Saleh would oversee its operations.

¶12. (SBU) According to Boguma, if Christians had a problem with extremism they would undergo similar screening, but presently Christian preachers remained unregulated. Reverend Faye Pama Umar, a representative of Borno State's Christian Association of Nigeria chapter, said no formal system existed for endorsement of Christian preachers. Christians, however, informed the police, State Security Services, and military of planned preaching events.

¶13. (C) Deputy Governor Dibal described the State's Ministry of Religious Affairs as "powerless," claiming the Ministry had "collapsed" under Governor Sheriff's leadership.

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However, he said, the Ministry should monitor the activities of religious groups and should know every imam and scholar. He opined that "unless the government is in touch with the clerics, there will always be a problem."

SECURITY DOWNGRADED

¶14. (C) The Deputy Governor told PolOffs that authorities arrested and jailed over 100 people and separated a few "hardened" individuals from the group. Military personnel deployed to Borno had returned to the barracks, and the level of security officers in the state had resumed normal levels, according to Dibal. He also noted that authorities had removed all senior police and military officers from Borno to prevent them from being targeted by Yusuf's followers. However, despite the downgrade of security presence in Borno, Dibal said the security situation remained "dicey" and acknowledged frequent border crossings. The Shehu advocated for additional security in Borno. Abdullahi said the people had "not yet recovered" from the violence and that the rate of arms coming into Borno was "frightening". He said the brigade's imam told him that security was too relaxed. Several observers indicated they did not anticipate additional bloodshed in the near future, but they did not rule out future violence.

¶15. (C) Several interlocutors claimed Yusuf's deputy remained alive with audio tapes in circulation proclaiming that Boko Haram will carry out additional attacks. Despite that, Boguma said the "wave of fundamentalism has been crushed." He did not think that those who fled would plan a "comeback." He added that the Gwange area of Maiduguri remained most

vulnerable as a recruiting ground for extremists, as people who settled there from Gwaza were poor and illiterate. Omar and the Shehu of Borno also expressed doubt that Boko Haram would regroup, with their leader gone and people scattered. However, the Borno State PDP Chairperson Baba Basharu warned that people were fed up with the government and Boko Haram could seem like "child's play," unless something is done quickly.

RELIGIOUS TENSIONS REMAIN

¶16. (C) Even though the Boko Haram violence was not sectarian, it provoked inter-religious tensions. Dibal said some Christians believed the government gave Boko Haram land, while some Muslims believed Southern Christians funded Boko Haram. According to Reverend Umar, the Christian community believed they were targeted, in part, because the Christians introduced western education to the region. Umar stated the government should provide compensation for the 29 churches damaged by Boko Haram and should strategically deploy security forces into communities to deter violence.

¶17. (SBU) Umar claimed authorities denied religious education to Christians at public schools in Borno and refused to issue certificates of occupancy for churches. He said he occasionally spoke to the Secretary of the Muslim umbrella organization, Jamatu Nasril Islam, but said the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council did not operate in Borno State.

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COMMENT

¶18. (C) Earlier this year, the Minister of Labor publicly cited World Bank estimates that Nigeria has 40 million unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 25. With limited education opportunities, widespread poverty, and sustained religious tensions, the Northeast remains susceptible to exploitation by unscrupulous politicians, conflict, and extremist attacks.

SANDERS